Can't draw a straight line? Well, you certainly can type one. Here's your chance to become a recognized artist in your own time when you take up the creative art of RTTY graphics.

RTTY Artwork

The "Keys" To Becoming An Artist

BY JOHN EDWARDS*, KI2U

Let's face it: Amateur radio and art are two fields usually not associated with each other. Sure, there's always the fellow who eschews the prepackaged designs from QSL manufacturers and decides to tackle the artwork by himself. But outside of that, there's really little relationship between the two endeavors. Right? Wrong!

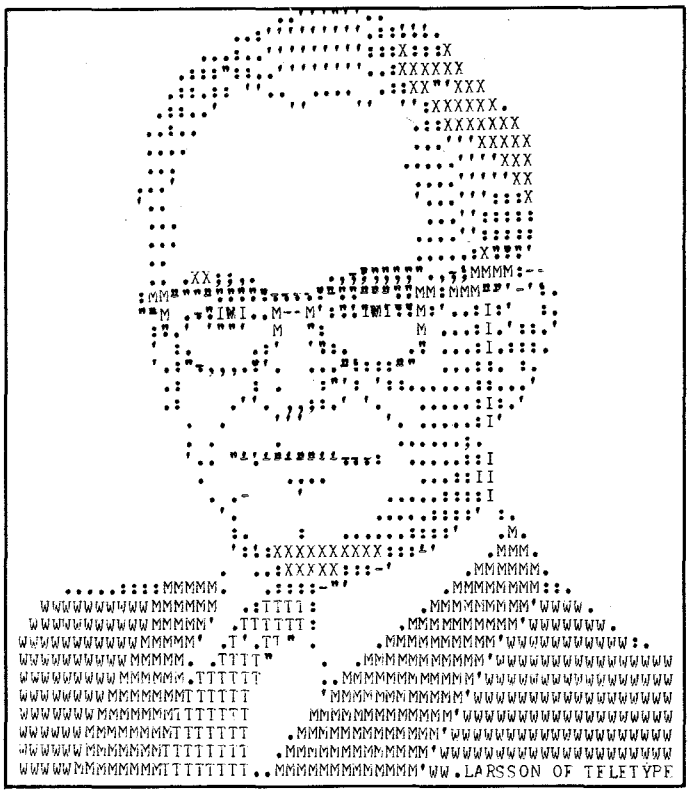
If you've tuned across the RTTY frequencies for more than a few days, no doubt you've stumbled across a signal or two that seem to be utter garbage. You know, no matter how you tune the signal—170 or 850 Hz shift, normal or reverse sense, all the different Baudot and ASCII speeds—no matter what you do, your printer or video display spews gibberish. Since the FCC forbids cryptic codes, you realize that something must be going on, only you're not sure what.

Yet, as you allow the seemingly nonsensical print to continue, you notice that the information isn't junk. The jumble is forming a pattern, and soon, after a few lines are printed, a *picture* is beginning to form! What we're talking about, of course, is RTTY art—a pastime for many green keyers that seems to border on addiction. It's a hobby within a sub-hobby and one of the few ways an amateur radio operator can express his or her artistic talents over the air.

Basics

For those of you new to RTTY art, a short history lesson is in order. This fascinating pursuit got its start back in the early days of landline news service Teletype. The apocryphal story about the first RTTY picture revolves around lonely TTY operators stuck with the night shift on Christmas Eve—a traditionally slow news time. To kill the long, bleak hours, one of these operators started typing little pictures of Christmas trees made out of Xs and shipped the pictures around the net. Soon, other operators took the cue, and pictures of increasing elaboration were sent whenever there wasn't traffic to move, Christmastime or not.

Whether this little tale is true is of little importance. The fact is that when Teletype hit the amateur airwaves, RTTY pictures soon followed. Today, there are literally thousands of pictures for the RTTY art enthusiast to reproduce on his or her home machine. Some stations own so many RTTY picture tapes that just transmitting a list of them can take well over an hour—even at 100 w.p.m.! But getting started in RTTY art, whether you have a mechanical or electronic RTTY system, is really very simple. All it takes is a little patience and a smattering of the aforementioned artistic skill.



This familiar portrait of Barry Goldwater, K7UGA was done by "Larsson of Teletype."

From Concept To Print

Finding a suitable subject for your first RTTY art effort should prove easy. Magazine covers, newspaper photos,

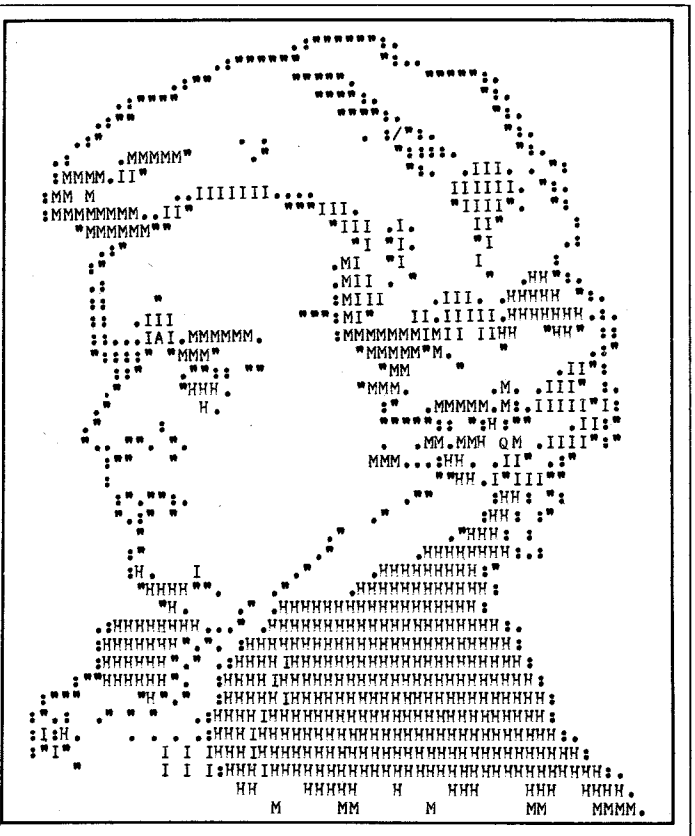
*78-56 86th St., Glendale, N.Y. 11385

and even your own original drawings, all provide excellent material. The traditional way of generating RTTY art requires access to a mechanical printer and reperforator. (We'll cover the topic of creating art with an electronic RTTY system later.)

Take the original artwork you've selected and tape or glue it to the paper feeding into your machine. Next, activate the reperf and type out 20 or 30 **BLANKS** to form a leader for the tape. Hit a couple of **CARRIAGE RETURN**s, five or six **LINE FEED**s, and proceed to *type over* the artwork in your printer.

As you can see in the accompanying illustrations, various alphabet letters furnish different shading characteristics. W, M, and X are generally used for darker areas, while H, I, and punctuation supply lighter shades. Some intricate RTTY pictures even use overlines (lines printed twice without a line feed) to give extra definition. On the whole, however, it's better to avoid this practice since many machines have an automatic line feed feature that can ultimately make a mess out of your picture at the receiving end. Also, on some machines you'll find that the **BELL** and **APOSTROPHE** keys are reversed. So if you must use an apostrophe, it's also a good idea to throw in a bell at the same time. This way, your picture will be compatible with both machine types, although it may make your shack sound like New Year's Eve in a bell tower.

At the bottom of your creation, be sure to center a title and sign your name and callsign in the lower right-hand corner. Follow this up with another five or six line feeds and a long series of blanks as a protective end-leader. Finally, take your finished picture and examine it from a distance of four or five feet. Does it look good? Hope so. But don't be too disappointed if your first effort isn't completely satisfactory. After all, great artists aren't make overnight!



For the doubly cultured, we offer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) as originated by Lee, WA5EHA. This piece was "relayed" to Manny, WB8OGB, who sent it on to Ken, WA4MNT, who sent it up to John and finally on to CQ.

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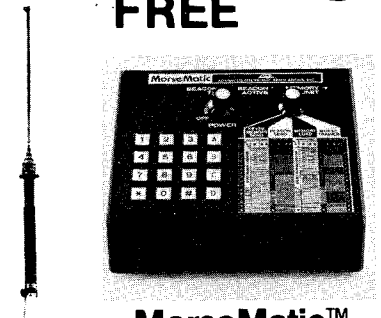

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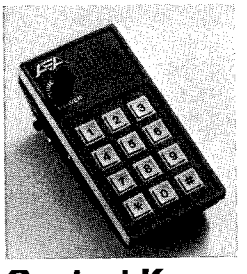
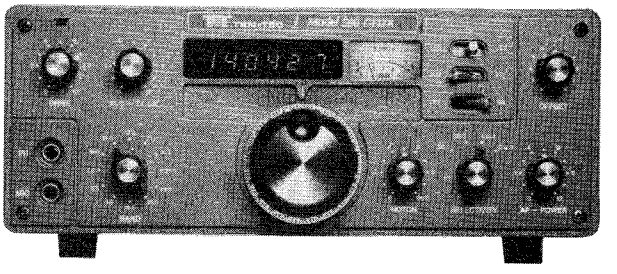


Contest Keyer



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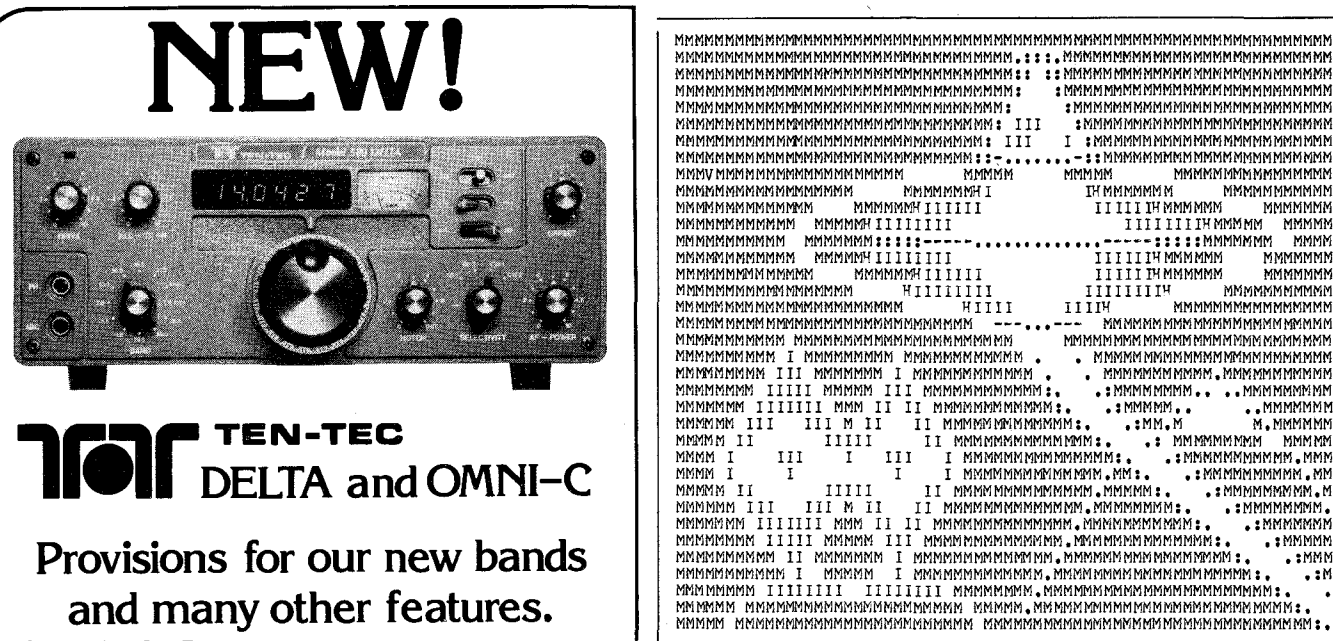


VE2QO's work entitled "U.F.O." was a 1975 RTTY Art Contest entry.

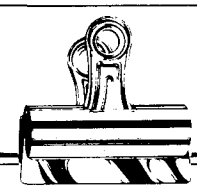
Electronic Systems

Generating RTTY art on one of the microcomputer-based RTTY systems creates some extra problems—and expenses. Since you'll want a permanent copy of your completed artwork, a printer is an absolute necessity. Of course, new computer printers can cost as much as an entire RTTY system, so this avenue may be out of the question for the less well-heeled RTTY user. If possible, you may consider purchasing an old read-only (keyboardless) Baudot printer. Prices for these units are low (under $100), and since nearly all RTTY pictures are currently Baudot formatted, you won't even have to do any conversion work (although you may have to obtain a separate demodulator, depending on your specific setup).

If for one reason or another you can't accommodate one of these units, you'll have to content yourself with viewing the action on your video display. This is a dismal prospect at best, since most larger pictures won't fit on a conventional display's screen, and virtually all general purpose displays use white-on-black lettering, thereby presenting a negative picture image. Still, it's better than nothing.

Once you get past the display hurdle, however, the picture brightens considerably (pun intended!). Editing of pictures is simplified and storage is easily maintained on cassettes, putting an end to the miles of paper tape that always seems so attractive to cats, puppies, and little children.

RTTY art—is it for you? Who knows, the amateur bands may hold within them dozens of untapped Rembrandts. Or, if band conditions drop out and pictures scramble, Picassos.



Say You Saw It In CQ!